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Improving Visibility of Talent: Analysis of Technical Skills and Cognitive Aptitude of Navy Officers

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Monterey, California: Naval Postgraduate School

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NPS NRP Executive Summary

Improving Visibility of Talent:

Analysis of Technical Skills and Cognitive Aptitude of Navy Officers

Report Date: 31/01/2019 Project Number (IREF ID): NPS-18-N320-A

Naval Postgraduate School / School: GSBPP & GSOIS



NAVAL RESEARCH PROGRAM
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MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

**Improving Visibility of Talent: Analysis of Technical Skills and
Cognitive Aptitude of Navy Officers**

Executive Summary Type: Final Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project Summary

Under the *Sailor 2025*, *Force of the Future*, and *Talent Management* initiatives the Navy is increasing efforts to recruit, develop, assign and retain the most talented officers. On-going research and work supporting the Performance Evaluation Transformation (PET) have tentatively identified several dimensions of talent, or capability. This study aimed to support the efforts to validate the traits identified by the PET working group for use as signals of talent and predictors of high performers.

Keywords: *Performance Evaluation Transformation, Identifying talent and high quality in the Navy, measures of talent integrated qualitative and quantitative analysis*

Background

As acknowledged by CNP in January 2018, the U.S. Navy is in a “war for talent” that requires the modernization of personnel management and training systems to more effectively recruit, develop, manage, reward, and retain a talented manpower.

‘Sailor 2025’ includes several initiatives aimed at overhauling personnel management policies from promotion and advancement, to evaluations and Fitness Reports (FITREPS), selection boards, educational and other professional development opportunities.

Under this initiative, the Navy is undergoing a Performance Evaluation Transformation (PET), which seeks to correct shortfalls in the legacy system, which include (but are not limited to) the tendency to value tenure over performance, the reverse-engineering of member trait values, the ill-adaptedness of mentoring/counseling and job matching functions of the tools and processes. In undergoing this transformation, the Navy aims to take advantage of state of the art tech tools, more accurate metrics and more robust social science practices to improve system efficiency and effectiveness in personnel management and to instill confidence in the process and the tools from the leadership levels to the deck plates. The third PET pilot is ongoing, followed by phased implementation. Validation and implementation

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requires effective talent identification and assessment. This study aimed to support the efforts to validate the traits identified by the PET working group for use as signals of talent and predictors of high performers.

Findings and Conclusions

To support Navy leadership decision-makers' efforts to identify and measure talent, our study used an integrated quantitative and qualitative approach.

The qualitative part of the study included an effort to integrate the previous two investigations toward understanding talent in the US Navy more broadly. Previous work by Nissen and Tick (2017) focused on the Navy Information Warfare (IW) Community, while Nissen and Tick (2018) focused on the Surface Warfare Community (SWO). Both studies have been enlightening and informative, and we have a much better understanding now, both of what talent means in each community and what steps are important for retaining our talented officers in each. Indeed, we find *talent* to represent a situated and nuanced concept, with key characteristics differing across ranks, roles, jobs and other factors that also vary over time. Hence, it has been uncertain whether the talent we retain is the best to meet our present, much less our future, needs.

In this present study, we continued to integrate a quantitative approach with our qualitative approach to increase the visibility and understanding of talent in the US Navy. Using personnel data on naval officers commissioned between 1999 and 2003 and followed annually until promotion to O4 or until separation, the quantitative study aims to determine job relatedness and performance indicators of legacy fitness report scores. In our study, we looked for alternative measures that can indicate a high performer as predicted by the legacy fitness report scores that establish job relatedness and performance. Fitness reports can differentiate officers' performance via individuals' trait scores and via promotion recommendations by the Reporting Senior. We used fitness report scores to build performance indexes and to test their power to predict performance of naval officers later in their career. This is especially important, as the new performance evaluation system will reward the potential of future capability versus past performance. By using a five-year period, we captured information from a series of annual performance reviews that covered a variety of jobs and supervisors. We were able to propose and validate alternative measures of past performance to identify officers who are likely to be high performers in the future.

The findings from the integrated qualitative and integrative study confirm the situated and nuanced nature of talent, but they also highlight common elements across the two communities studied. These common elements may prove insightful for understanding and retaining talent across the US Navy.

Recommendations for Further Research

Given the tight competition for talent, the Navy could benefit from a better understanding of how different talent markers differ by community, and how to seamlessly transition from the legacy to the new evaluation system in a way that rewards, mentors, trains and retains the most talented, high quality personnel. Follow

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on studies can use multivariate statistical analysis combined with the most current qualitative research methods to identify which elements from the legacy FITREP system measure 'past performance', and which elements measure 'future potential'.

Another direction for a future study is to consider an integrated qualitative and quantitative approach to investigate the relation between dissemination of the Navy Desired Leader Attributes (NDLAs) used to identify expected character qualities, behaviors, and skills, as markers of talent, and the officers' performance. What is the relation between dissemination of the Navy Desired Leader Attributes (NDLAs) and the officers' performance? What are the counseling, mentoring and coaching needs to develop the officers' potential and generate quality? The follow on study could use qualitative methods to identify counseling, mentoring and coaching needs to develop the officers' potential and generate quality.

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Acronyms

FITREPS - Fitness Reports
IW - Information Warfare
NDLA - Navy Desired Leader Attributes
PET - Performance Evaluation Transformation
SWO - Surface Warfare